

NORDIC 2.0 INITIATIVES

A SNAPSHOT IN AUTUMN 2009

It is a pretty near impossible task to attempt an all encompassing picture of how Nordic public libraries work with different types of social networking tools, or how libraries use traditional web solutions together with web 2.0 applications.

Something that is red-hot one year can be technically dated and old half a year later. Continual upgrades, adjustments and improvements are the norm. A telling metaphor for web 2.0 is that it is 'in permanent beta' and this is certainly true of library 2.0. Products on show at exhibitions or featured in marketing material do not always reflect final release versions.

So, with these reservations I will try to present a picture of the current situation in the Nordic Countries – starting with Sweden as it is the country I am most familiar with. Generally speaking, Integrated Library Systems – which are mainly what we are considering here – include CMS software for publishing web content and an automated library system with modules for cataloguing and circulation. The basic system can be augmented with additional functions and applications designed to promote social networking with and for library patrons.

CS Library from Teknikhuset

The first and so far most successful library 2.0 product is CS Library developed by Teknikhuset AB. To date (Autumn 2009), 26 municipal libraries in Sweden have chosen CS Library or plan to in the near future. Teknikhuset is responsible for the development and maintenance of the web publishing application Content Studio which also incorporates open source components making it possible for

libraries to modify content according to local need. CS Library has been available for five years and is currently in its third version. Besides traditional web content such as contact information, hours of opening, etc., there is an ambition to create web sites that integrate social net-working functions with the library catalogue.

Visitors to such sites are given the opportunity to create a personal page where he or she can contribute their own reviews of books and other library materials. The idea being that the library site can function as a social meeting place for virtual conversations about reading and reading experiences and even be published as RSS feeds.

Searching the library catalogue can result in the creation of favourite lists or lists of new acquisitions based on personal preferences. Users will have access to language tools and catalogue searches will be able to be saved. If a search is unsuccessful, advanced search functions provide further help.

One of the main advantages of CS Library is the open interface OLA or Open Library Access. OLA allows a library's web publishing service to be independent of the library's automated system. This makes it possible for a group of libraries, which might have different automated systems, to share the same web site. There is also an ambition to promote the use of open source Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that allow the development of social networks and mashups and ensure their compatibility with library systems.

The flagship among Teknikhusets CS Library reference libraries is the website minabibliotek.se (mylibraries.se), which was given the prestigious United Nations Public Service Award in 2008 – an award for the best innovations within the public service sector. The year before My Library had already received the European Public Sector Award in the category Collaborative Governance. The My Library site is the result of a collaborative project between six municipal libraries in the Västerbotten County in the north of Sweden. The project is led by the Municipality of Umeå. The website, which was launched 2007, has around 60,000 hits per month (Autumn 2009). Site development and maintenance is carried out by a full-time webmaster assisted by three part-time assistants and local web groups at the other libraries. In true collaborative spirit all library personnel are expected to contribute content to the website.

Other web sites using CS Library are the Stockholm City Library with their portal Biblioteket.se, (TheLibrary.se), and the V8-libraries, a collaborative project between eight municipal libraries in the inland region of the County of Västerbotten. Teknikhuset and The Mölndal City Librarys have discussed integrating Mölndal's acclaimed subject catalogue with CS Library and perhaps even making it accessible for other libraries using the product. Teknikhuset has together with TPB (The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille) recently been commissioned to create a new CS Library web site focusing on literature for persons with print disabilities. The CS-Library concept is to be established in Finland during 2010.

Axiell Arena

Axiell is Sweden's largest supplier of automated library systems (Book It, Libra.se) and they too have a Web 2.0 solution based on open source code: Axiell Arena. At this point, Spring 2010, roughly 60 libraries – mainly municipal – have signed a contract with Axiell to use Arena as a platform to enable communication with and between library patrons. As with CS Library, Axiell Arena defines itself as a platform designed to complement the physical library with a virtual library. That the library catalogue is fully integrated with Arena is both a strength and a weakness. Advantageous if the library already uses one of Axiell's automated systems. On the other hand there are probably no other automated systems that work together with Arena.

Arena, like CS Library, allows the library to invite virtual visitors to participate and interact, and to be inspired by reviews, user-generated ratings and tags. Arena is collaborative within the Axiell Arena library family; tags, user-generated ratings and reviews are pooled resources for Arena libraries. Information is centrally stored and automatically accessible to participating libraries. Arena is built around open standards and open source code and can be installed as a framework for library applications which can either be used as the library's sole web portal or be integrated as a complement to an existing municipal web portal.

According to the product information the current version of Arena (1.0) features smart searching. If a search does not return any results help can be gotten from suggestions about similar titles or alternative spelling. There is an extended search result function with user-generated ratings and book covers sorted according to relevance, author, title or year of publication. Searches can also be converted to RSS feeds. It is possible to add and show tags, reviews and user-generated ratings. There are a number of interesting modules that can be integrated within Arena such as AXL web links portal, Axiell BookDesire, Axiell Karta 2.0 and on-line payment of fines and charges. As well, Arena's catalogue has a number of special features of the kind one expects in a modern OPAC.

Planned for the next version are book lists based on topical interests, an option to see which other books were borrowed by patrons who borrowed the book in question, an option to create book clubs with other readers and 'My Own Library': a function similar to the web application Library Thing. There is a clear ambition to position Arena as an interactive product where the library's virtual room has a social function just as important as the physical library.

Among libraries using Axiell Arena are the Norrköping City Library and The Lerum Library. Oxelösund, a municipality with a population around 11,000 inhabitants has recently (Spring 2010) launched a new web site, Koordinaten, built using Arena; a good example of how Arena works even in smaller municipalities with limited resources.

In the summer of 2009 Axiell announced that they had entered a collaborative agreement with the media company FörlagEtt. The collaboration meant that FörlagEtt's media jukebox (Mediejukeboxen) – A free standing device similar to a jukebox and housing a down-loading service with digital files (music, films, language courses, etc.) was adapted for use in Arena libraries. Axiell have also joined forces with Öppna Bibliotek, The Open Library. The Open Library is a database for book tips

and reviews, user-generated ratings, tags and other information. Libraries no longer need to produce all their own book and film tips. The ratings, reviews and tags created by users on different library web sites are accessible and visible in other Swedish libraries.

Regional Initiatives

Parallel with commercial interests – and sometimes in partnership with them – some Swedish county libraries have developed shared library web portals. In some cases library computer systems and library catalogues are more or less integrated with other applications. An example already referred to is the collaboration between V8 libraries in the County of Västerbotten where the county library has functioned as coordinator.

In 2007 a collaborative project in the County of Östergötland resulted in the creation of a shared library portal for municipal libraries in the county – Östgöta Libraries. Östgöta Libraries is built with Edge software supplied by local web production company, Teknomedia. Municipal libraries in the county and the Östergötland County Library are responsible for the project. Initially a shared library catalogue was not part of the project. Instead there was a meta search function which allowed parallel searching in several databases. Similar solutions were adopted in other parts of Sweden, e.g. larger library systems in central Sweden with their service Katalogsök MellanSverige (Central Swedish Catalogue Search).

In November 2008 library directors in the County of Östergötland decided to create a shared library computer system for the entire county. Politicians responsible for library policy and the Östsam Regional Development Council supported the decision. The project started in the spring of 2009 and is expected to be completed 2010. A similar project has been initiated by the Värmland County Library with the web portal Library Värmland, a portal giving access to the collected library resources in the county.

Nine municipal libraries in the Gävleborg County have, for the past few years, used a shared library catalogue based on Axiell's Book IT automated library system. The

joint effort is called HelGe-Library and incorporates practical cooperation on questions such as inter-urban loans, inter-communal transport and now even includes a library membership card valid in all of the participating municipalities. Parallel with this the Gävleborg County Library started a web portal called Webbiblioteket, The Web Library using the web/blog publishing tool Wordpress. The Web Library provides a shared portal for access to the municipal libraries' different web services.

Libraries in the northernmost County of Norrbotten are also working together, the result being the web portal Biblio.se which is built using Joomla, an open source content management system. Iphone users can get reading suggestions from Biblio directly in their phone.

Other Interesting Nordic Library 2.0 Initiatives

Norway

The PODE-project looks at new ways of using mash applications and metadata found in library catalogues. There are two main working models: 'The trip planner' which links travel guides in the library catalogue with place names from Geonames, Google Maps, weather information from the Norwegian weather service Yr and book covers from the Bokkilden bookshop and the Open Library.

The idea behind the music mash is to connect the music catalogue with recommendations based on similar artists and albums based on functionality taken from the LastFM music community. The catalogue records are also enhanced with facts and illustrations relating to the artists.

The Library Laboratory – BibLab is a collaborative project between ABM-utvikling (The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority) and the Oslo University College. BibLab is designed to be an active communications and developmental platform for those interested in the development of library data and social technology. BibLab has started a wiki to communicate and exchange ideas. A Norwegian version of the Open Library is due to be installed during 2010.



Rauma House of Culture, Norway
Photo: Thomas Dahle

Libriotech is a commercial company started by librarian Magnus Enger to market open source applications for libraries with the main focus being on the automated library system Koha.

Reaktor is a web portal started in 2010. This free web service is aimed at all those interested in film, photo, animation, music, comics, writing and drawing. Anyone can become a member and upload their own work, discuss other members' work and find new friends with the same interests. Reaktor was initiated by the Deichmanske Bibliotek (The Oslo Public Library) and the Trondheim Public Library and is collaboratively managed with Culturenet.no (The Norwegian cultural portal initiated and financed by the Ministry of Culture and Church affairs) with support from ABM-utvikling.

Denmark

One of the most exciting Nordic projects relating to web-based solutions for libraries is the Danish project Ting. The municipal libraries in Copenhagen and Århus have started a cooperative project with the Danish Bibliographic Centre (DBC) to create a common universal platform for the future information needs of Danish libraries. The goal is to give libraries free access to all jointly owned information sources. The resource will be continuously updated with data resulting from interaction with patrons. This information will then be made accessible to libraries and other participants through open APIs allowing dissemination of information irrespective of interface, platform or type of material. Ting is built using the CMS tool Drupal. Århus and Copenhagen launched their new Ting-based web sites in March 2010. Around the same time a new library web portal for children was launched, Pallesgavebod (Palle's Gift Shop), even that site being built with the help of Ting.

Free is good

The dominant trend just now is social networking; more specifically, blogs, Twitter, Facebook not least of which are tools for open source codes which can support functions for social and mobile webs.

Many library strategists are interested in the development of free library computer systems in the Nordic market. Koha is considered a possible option in Norway and this has inspired the Halland County Library to conduct a test project with Koha. Municipal libraries in Norbotten are interested in testing the open source library software Evergreen.

A future scenario might be the development of APIs that connect library catalogues to social webs and even encompass similar applications for mobile phones. It is obvious that such developments will be closely followed by suppliers of library solutions and products as well as those organisations responsible for library development on a national level.

Another trend is the tendency to see the library's presence on the social webs as part of their marketing activities instead of as branch libraries. It is characteristic that many of the libraries actively working with integrated library systems also create a presence for themselves on social networking sites such as Facebook. This is a result of actively embracing integrated library systems which, in turn, increases knowledge about how social networking functions.

This is a new experience and traditional library web sites just are not the answer. Libraries have to be where people get together virtually.

Public libraries are there where people work together to build knowledge. Evidence of this can be seen in Helsingør Denmark, where they use a wiki, Helsingør Leksikon. Here, the library is a partner as are the local folklore society, genealogists, and an interested public in presenting local history.

Openly contributing to a common knowledge base is going to be more important than a monopoly on knowledge. It is a sign of the times when leading encyclopedias such as The Great Danish Encyclopedia and the Great Norwegian Encyclopedia are made available to the public free of charge.

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